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May 27, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Madam Secretary:

The Agricultural Marketing Service, AMS, is currently conducting "Hearing Sessions" through out the country as to how best implement the Country-Of-Origin, COOL, law that becomes effective October 2004. In this endeavor the AMS issued, as I understand, the following guidelines seeking public input.

1. Is record keeping necessary for the operation of this voluntary program and if so would this information have a practical value?
2. Is the USDA's estimate of the burden of record keeping requirements, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used, accurate?
3. What are the different ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of records to be maintained?
4. What are the different ways to minimize the burden of the record keeping on those who are to maintain and/or make the records available, including the use of appropriate automated electronic mechanical, or other technological record keeping techniques or other forms of information technology?

This undertaking put to the AMS is an unfair burden. The focus has been on marketing and not on matters that relate to disease control because the AMS is not able to address issues of animal health. This is unfair. Question four of the guidelines, for example, discusses such things as electronic ear tags; i.e., technological record keeping techniques. Electronic ear tags are important in the control and monitoring such diseases as BSE that has been confirmed in Canada.

The use of an individual animal identification program plugged into a data-collection reporting system will allow such a system to immediately isolate the source of any health risk. An electronic tracking system would help the USDA in controlling diseases as BSE (Mad Cow Disease) and Hoof and Mouth Diseases. These electronic ear tag tracking devices will serve to safeguard both public health and increase public confidence in the beef supply. It will help the industry to quickly trace disease sources, focus remedial action only where its needed and provide customers with additional assurances that the meat they are buying is safe. The Northwest Feeders wrote to your office on January 18, 2003 and stated. "The real source of the problem begins with the fact that the U.S. cattle industry does not have an individual animal I.D. system currently in place."

With the discovery of BSE in Canada, it is important to learn of the experience about the animal identification in Canada as a means to control this devastating livestock disease. The Canadians have a program that is called the Canadian Cattle Identification Program. The Canadians state that their "identification system increases the efficiency of a trace back by 90% and will help ensure the rapid containment and elimination of potentially devastating reportable diseases and major food safety defects as well as any unforeseen new problem that may arise... Individual identification will result in far fewer herds quarantined and tested, not more. It will cut down by about 90% the number of herds needing to be tested to find the source of a problem, meaning less inconvenience for producers and a faster resolution to the problem."

As to the BSE discovered in Canada, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency said, "regarding the BSE investigation in Alberta, all calves that have left the herd in question have been identified with an official CCIA tag and the cattle ID program is proving invaluable with this trace out situation."

So there you have it. The Canadians are saying in their time of need, " THE CATTLE ID PROGRAM IS PROVING INVALUABLE."

As good as the Canadians say their animal ID system is, there are still problems. An article, "Canada Probing Mad Cow Discovery by Tom Cohen of the Associated Press that appeared in the Sacramento Bee 5-22-03 wrote about Dr. Claude Lavigne, a Canadian food inspector. "Another food inspection agency official, Dr. Claude Lavigne, told a news conference a brand on the stricken cow's hide led investigators to one of the other farms now under quarantine but officials still don't know where the animal was born or how it contracted BSE. He also said calves born in the stricken cow's most recent herd were being tracked, but he said inexact records made that difficult."

There lies a challenge to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Electronic ear tags will help meet that challenge. In lieu of the BSE disease, diagnosed in Canada, I believe you have the authority to put in place those measures that will give the nation's livestock industry the protection that an electronic ear tag system will provide for trace back to origin source.

Before I close, I would like to call your attention Canada's position concerning the COOL law. On January 21, 2003 the Canadian government took issue with the implementation of the COOL law and submitted a four page paper, "Government of Canada Comments On Request For Emergency Approval Of New Information Collection." An analysis of this paper is in order.

One of Canada's main bone of contention are the costs to the U.S. farmers. The Canadian government wrote. "The costs of implementing relatively sophisticated tracking and tracing systems, which COOL effectively requires, will be disproportionately large for U.S. farmers."... U.S. auction yards and cattle dealers will also have to keep records. Individual cattle or lots of cattle are often co-mingled at

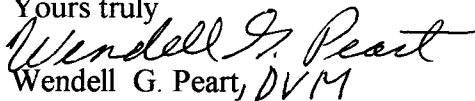
auction yards or by country dealers. The information chain that would have to be maintained at this level may include tagging, reading tags, and given the absence of a mandatory universal animal identification system management and transfer of country-of-origin information from a number of different identification systems from sellers to buyers.”

The attempt of Canada’s government to shoot down the merits of the COOL law as it relates to a national animal ID system will be hard for the Canadians to defend particularly when they print that their “cattle ID program is proving invaluable” in the fight against the spread of BSE in Canada.

Finally, I would like to say there are those who have expressed reservations about the COOL law stating that they feel the record keeping will pose an undue burden as well as costs rather than the horrendous costs that a foreign disease could do to the U.S. livestock industry. May I suggest that in the remaining Hearing Sessions about the COOL law that are still to be held in the U.S. that the following question be put to the participants that address the Hearing Commission.

Will you support the implementation of a electronic animal I.D. for the control of and monitoring devastating animals diseases such as Hoof and Mouth and Mad Cow Disease?

Yours truly



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